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# BEYOND THE STATS

You See Percentages,  
I See Success!

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CALIFORNIA **YOUTH** CONNECTION  
LEADERSHIP & POLICY CONFERENCE 2010

**D**EAR READER, The two thousand and ten Summer Leadership and Policy Conference was held at San Jose State University, hosted by the Santa Clara Chapter of California Youth Connection (CYC) from Friday, July 30th – Monday, August 2nd. The summer conference brought together 107 youth to tackle four subjects that we (members of CYC) determined were very important matters at hand in foster care in the year 2010. The four subjects that were discussed are **PERMANENCY**, **TRANSITIONAL SERVICES**, **HIGHER EDUCATION** and what we all know as a big topic today, our **BUDGET**.





Our four topics were chosen by CYC's youth-led Advisory Board and county based chapters, who identified common issues that foster youth face across California. The list was narrowed down to the top four issues that CYC members felt were the most pressing and important topics. Several youth members and staff developed curriculum to lead members through a process to discuss the topics identified and create policy recommendations to address them. During the Summer Leadership and Policy Conference youth facilitators ran the curriculum and helped CYC members identify good and bad experiences within these 4 topics. Members then identified solutions to resolve challenges youth currently face or replicate good experiences some youth have. These solutions are further developed into the policy recommendations outlined in this report.

Goals of the Conference were for CYC members to accomplish the following:

**GOOD PRACTICES:** To identify good practices, which are effective programs or practices in some counties, and to identify why these programs or practices are effective and outline how other counties can replicate them.

**IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES:** To create implementation strategies for current laws or policies that are not happening or not consistently happening in counties and clearly outline how counties can put these laws into action.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:** To clearly identify solutions to the problems foster youth face across the state and develop policy recommendations that outline how the state government can address those problems or replicate the good experiences youth have.

**BUDGET PRIORITIES:** To understand the budget process and discuss how the current budget climate is affecting foster youth across the state; develop a list of priorities for counties to consider when making funding decisions based on the types and characteristics of programs that are effective in supporting youth and should not be cut.

With great pleasure of producing this report, I must say this has been a very exciting and long journey. Getting to know youth my age who are going through very similar issues as myself makes me feel and know that I am not alone in the fight to be treated like a human being. All the foster youth who don't have family to run to for anything or for support is the hardest barrier one could face in life. I was able to get to know a lot more youth who share experiences such as mine and this is a great thing to

***"I am not alone in the fight to be treated like a human being."***

know that you are not in a fight all alone. California Youth Connection members

worked extremely hard this weekend to make important recommendations to better the foster care system for those who will enter it, along with those who haven't emancipated out of the system yet.

Youth traveled from all over California to get to San Jose for this amazing conference. We may have come from diverse places with many different backgrounds but this weekend we were all there for the same reason: youth in the system and those who have emancipated out of the system need support to succeed, and we came together to make a difference in their lives along with those they interact with.

Please join our fight in helping improve the lives of foster youth.

Sincerely,

*LaToya Mae Brown*



**LA TOYA MAE BROWN**

*Primary Author*

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# Permanency

*Many youth who spend their childhood in the foster care system spend years being shuffled from placement to placement, sometimes being ripped permanently away from their siblings (two thirds never experience birth family reunification<sup>1</sup>). When foster youth are placed into care, their family is replaced with social workers, foster parents, foster siblings, CASA's, lawyers, etc. Foster youth express an inherent desire for a stable connection with a caring adult, but unfortunately most social workers are overworked, underpaid and insufficiently trained to prioritize finding these lasting relationships for the youth they work with. In foster care we refer to these lifelong relationships as "permanency".*

There are two different types of permanency acknowledged in the child welfare system. The first is known as legal permanency, which involves family reunification, adoption and guardianship (both by family and non-related family)<sup>2</sup> and is ordered by a judge. The second type of permanency is relational and is not court appointed, but involves a youth's connection with at least one caring and supportive adult (friend or family member), who provides a committed lifelong supportive relationship with the youth.<sup>3</sup> This includes a psychological permanency, which speaks to an individuals' sense of permanency and belonging, including the youth's perception of their current placement or the role this person plays in the youth's life, rather than a legal status. For this type of relationship to develop naturally between youth and the adults in their lives, youth need to have the opportunity to be around positive adults and adults need to have the opportunity to be a consistent presence.

Permanency gives youth a stable

environment and people they can count on for support when they need it. Youth articulate the great desire for finding permanency to succeed to their fullest ability. Workshops during the conference allowed those youth who are currently or

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## *Two-thirds of foster youth never experience birth family reunification.*

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have previously experienced the horrible process of being constantly moved from placement to placement to talk about why permanency is important and how the foster care system can better help youth find permanent connections. When youth's placements are constantly moved there are many barriers they face in achieving permanency and ultimately their goals, here is just a short list of examples: they are not able to pursue things such as making and keeping friends; they move from one school district to another and have a hard time finishing school or getting their credits to transfer; and many foster youth have siblings who are facing regular place-

ment changes too, which makes it even harder for foster youth to stay connected and close to their siblings.

For example, Britani a current foster youth wishes to be a stable youth with her siblings right by her side to help her progress in life. A lot of youth are in the same or similar positions as Britani. Youth who are separated from their siblings often spend a lot of time worrying about the wellbeing of their siblings and find it difficult to move forward and focus on their own future. Youth everywhere want to be stable, but because social workers have so many youth on their caseloads, many times social workers find it easier to focus

more on finding any open bed for youth rather than a permanent connection or taking the time to find alternate placements in the same community that let youth maintain connections with siblings, school and friends.<sup>4</sup>

As permanency is defined, it is the life long caring relationship between a youth and adult. However, CYC members in the permanency workshop also expressed significant concern about the lack of relationships that can developed beyond the adults who work with them when placements continually change. When youth change placements regularly, not only do they not have a place to call their own, but it also



does not allow them to stay in one place long enough to build lasting relationships with teachers, neighbors, friends' families, or other adults who could potentially become a permanent connection. Youth and caregivers need support from social workers to maintain healthy relationships, communication and the placement. Ka'Tina expressed that if someone had had regular meetings with her and her caregiver her

stay would have been much easier, "I don't think she fully understood her role as a foster parent. It's really important for both sides to understand their role as a youth and a foster parent."

Not having a permanent relationship with an adult or a person to go to when they are in need of support or resources, limits the security and support foster youth receive as young adults. Permanent

connections create a long-term community and support network for foster youth, as biological families often do for children who grow up in their own homes. These youth, who will soon be living on their own and are said to be our future, are not provided with the emotional and physical support they need once they are no longer eligible for foster care transitional services.

#### FACTS ON PERMANENCY

- Foster youth change placements on average every 6 to 10 months<sup>5</sup> and nearly 50% of foster youth reported they had to change schools at least three times because of placement changes.<sup>6</sup>
- Youth with multiple placements are less likely to maintain a permanent connection and 5-10 times more likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system than youth in the average population.<sup>7</sup>
- Maintaining permanent connections supports placement stability by attending to youths' ongoing need for emotional connectedness.<sup>8</sup>
- Permanent connections are important when placement changes have to be made – physical location may change, but emotional connections can be sustained.<sup>9</sup>
- 41% of emancipated foster youth wish they had been adopted,<sup>10</sup> but in a study of the Bay Area, youth reported that relational rather than legal permanency was most important to them.<sup>11</sup>
- Children ages 10 and older report that social workers are not making inquiries concerning significant relationships and that little is done to ensure that youth are able to contact, visit, or spend quality time with these individuals.<sup>12</sup>
- Youth involved in a transitional housing program show a 14.1% increase in having a permanent adult connection, and over 45% reported being in a stable housing situation upon exit.<sup>13</sup>



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PERMANENCY

1. CYC recommends that for every youth eligible for Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP), the California Department of Social Services mandate counties hold permanency Team Decision Making meetings (TDMs) with family, social workers, attorneys, CASA's, staff, and others connected to the youth. These meetings should occur every 3 months until permanency is achieved, with every youth having more than one permanent connection.
2. CYC recommends that foster parents and youth should have a mandatory meeting with the social worker after a placement is identified, but before the placement begins to set expectations and discuss the living arrangement and expectations.
3. CYC recommends that every foster parent and youth should have a quarterly meeting with a family resource facilitator and with people in the youth's support system to address the living environment, behavior, self motivation, and responsibilities.

## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY FOR AB 705

Implementation of AB 705 – Foster Youth Sibling Rights – Passed in 2001, AB 705 requires a social worker who brings a youth into foster care to work towards placing the youth together with any siblings or half-siblings who are also in care. If this is not possible the social worker must include at the first hearing a statement of her/his continuing efforts to place the siblings together or why those efforts are not appropriate. This bill also addresses other logistical court proceedings.

## ACTION STEPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AB 705:

Counties should...

- Commit to evaluate their implementation AB 705
- Research why AB 705 is not being implemented
- Research what is working in other counties
- Have foster youth and community allies at the table in determining how best to implement AB 705 in their county

# Transitional Services

*Research shows that the average young person in the United States does not leave home and become fully self-sufficient until age 26; however, foster youth are expected to leave “home” and be fully self supported at 18 years old upon emancipation.<sup>14</sup> Although one of the goals of foster care is to prepare youth for adulthood, each year approximately 4,000 foster youth emancipate from the foster care system in California<sup>15</sup> after having been shuffled through the foster system often without the necessary guidance, support and resources to succeed.*

Emancipated youth are expected to secure and maintain housing, provide for medical needs and transportation, and secure employment for themselves, without the assistance and guidance of parents. In October 2010 California passed legislation AB12: California’s Fostering Connections to Success Act, which as of January 1, 2012 will allow California to utilize federal funds to extend foster care and transitional services to foster youth until the age of 20, with the intention of future resources to support youth until age 21. CYC and other child welfare advocacy organizations co-sponsored AB12 because we know that youth need support after their 18th birthday and according to studies, when youth emancipate at later ages, they are twice as likely to enroll in school or a training program, and over three times as likely to attend college. They are also significantly less likely to become pregnant, parent a child, experience economic hardship or become involved with the criminal justice system.<sup>16</sup>

The Fostering Connections to Success Act is a huge accomplishment. However,

the work is not done. Foster youth grow up in care with basic necessities taken care of, but studies show that social workers and other care providers are not taking adequate support measures to help youth access all of the resources available to them before aging out, such as mental health care, tutoring, Independent Living Program resources, financial literacy, employment assistance. and when youth emancipate they are often unable to access much of this support.

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***Studies show that social workers are not taking adequate measures to help youth access all of the resources available to them.***

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It is hard enough that foster youth have already faced many challenges and may currently be struggling as well. Foster youth, unlike their peers living with their biological families, rely on services to teach them skills needed for independent

living, employment and educational success. Recognizing the tight budget climate only makes the process of transitioning out of the system that much more complicated: there are fewer services available for both current and former foster youth, fewer jobs, and the cost of education is increasing each year. In addition, as mentioned in the permanency section of this report, foster youth lack personal and permanent relationships that they can rely on for support. Zairon, a former foster youth, went through his transitional experience entirely clueless on what was going to happen next. He was not even invited to his own emancipation hearing. No one took the time to help him form a plan to get him to his goals. As a result, in order to become self-sufficient he went from one urgent situation to another and learned through trial and error, and some errors could have led to homelessness or dropping out of school.

The other thing that became clear in workshops through the weekend was that “transition” services should actually be happening while youth are still in care. Much stress could be avoided for youth if they had more information about where to find assistance as they are transitioning. Many youth shared experiences of situations that if they had been able to access resources earlier, their transition would have been less stressful and harsh consequences could have been avoided.



### FACTS ON TRANSITIONAL SERVICES

- California State Law requires child welfare agencies to develop with each foster youth an emancipation plan for what the young adult will do after leaving care. But in practice, plans are often not made or are unrealistic.<sup>17</sup>
- Studies show that providing intensive services—such as housing, education and employment support—at the critical juncture when youth are aging out, helps them avoid negative social outcomes and achieve real long-term self-sufficiency.<sup>18</sup>
- The majority of youth exiting care do not feel they are prepared for adult living.<sup>19</sup>
- Although Independent Living Programs are designed to provide training and assistance for obtaining employment, many youth do not feel they have knowledge on interviewing skills, resume writing and basic job skills to obtain employment.<sup>20</sup>
- Nearly 40% of transitioning youth will be homeless within 18 months of emancipation<sup>21</sup> and 40% of people in homeless shelters were once foster youth.<sup>22</sup>
- Youth involved in a transitional housing program show a 14.1% increase in having a permanent adult connection, and over 45% reported being in a stable housing situation upon exit. Also, from entrance to exit, an increased 64.1% of participants received their GED.<sup>23</sup>
- Foster youth often do not receive the emotional, moral and social support that would aid their transition to adulthood<sup>24</sup> because of placement instability, improper emancipation planning and uneducated placement staff. At the time of emancipation, foster youth are expected to be adults when less than 50% report being mentored while growing up.<sup>25</sup>



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRANSITIONAL SERVICES

1. CYC recommends that there be one transition age youth center in every county where youth can do laundry, eat, and receive counseling services for mental health needs, as well as, receive vital documents. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and the Department of Mental Health should collaborate to fund the centers as well as pursue public-private partnerships. Staff recruitment should prioritize current and former foster youth.
2. CYC recommends that all counties establish youth savings accounts to be matched at 100% up to \$1000 per year for up to three years.
3. CYC recommends that youth be notified of Independent Living Program (ILP) services by their social worker six months prior to being eligible for ILP.
4. CYC recommends that CDSS mandate all counties create a foster youth action network that will register foster youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years old for all qualifying emancipating support services. The action network will be responsible for identifying all the services available to these youth in their county.
5. CYC recommends that in order to support a transitioning youth, social workers should be required to provide the youth with a copy of a foster youth resource guide. The guide should be supplied to youth one year before emancipation. Similar legislation, AB 2342, was introduced by Assembly Member Evans in 2010 and vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger.
6. CYC recommends that social workers or probation officers inform youth of resources and/or positive extracurricular activities by giving youth a written information about the opportunities available to them and discussing the information with the youth at regular check-in meetings. This meeting will take place within six months of entering care or at age twelve if the youth enters care prior to their twelfth birthday. Action steps for involvement in extracurricular activities will be included in the youth's case plan on an ongoing basis.

## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY FOR AB 1979

Implementation of AB 1979 – Independent Living Program – In 2002 AB 1979 created statewide regulations for the Independent Living Program. The purpose of the state regulations is for every youth in California to have equal consistent access to ILP services regardless of the county they are placed in.

## ACTION STEPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AB 1979:

- ILP case managers should ensure that a wider selection of learning experiences are added to curriculum to enable youth to have access to community resources that correspond with individual youth's interests, current, and future goals.
- ILP case managers should connect youth with other resources such as financial assistance programs, employment/vocational opportunities, etc. (i.e. California Conservation Corps).
- ILP should be mandated to help youth identify higher education goals and develop a realistic plan to reach them.

# Higher Education

*In today's world, a college degree is almost a necessity to becoming economically self-sufficient. Yet, foster youth face a number of barriers in high school that often do not allow foster youth the ability to further their education. Considering that foster youth usually do not have mentors to support them through the college application process or are the first in their families attending college, applying for and attending college is challenging. Some of these barriers are not receiving the necessary academic preparation in high school and not obtaining the information needed to complete college and financial aid applications. If foster youth do manage to overcome these barriers and enter college, they still struggle to find the financial support to fund their living and education expenses and to receive the support on campus to successfully graduate from college.*

Despite the current awareness of issues foster youth face in higher education and programs like California College Pathways, which aims to increase foster youth access to campus support programs on college campuses, there is still a huge gap between the academic achievements of former foster youth and the average population. Most foster youth have the goal of continuing their education, but very few are able to reach this goal. Instead, the statistics show that many foster youth struggle to survive, never mind pursue a college degree, after leaving foster care.

As mentioned in the permanency section of this report, foster youth move placements regularly and often with placement changes come school changes. Several pieces of legislation (AB 490 and AB 1933) are intended to reduce school changes, but these changes still occur too often and foster youth lose credits, miss days of school and experience grief and

loss with each change. Many foster youth are not prepared or able to take advantage

***75% of foster youth perform below grade level and more than half are held back at least one year.***

of higher education opportunities because of negative school experiences and placement instability. As a result, foster youth have low levels of attainment and achievement in grades K-12. Statistics show that 75% of foster youth perform below grade level and over 50% are held back in school at least one year.<sup>26</sup> Stability and support during high school are essential for youth succeeding in high school and being able to attend higher education.

High schools that foster youth attend sometimes do not prepare youth to suc-

ceed and foster youth often fall in between the cracks. It may be that school counselors and those involved with teaching foster youth do not know how to help a youth who may have been through so much. Several CYC members in these workshops identified lack of information and/or sensitivity on the part of school staff to the situation of foster youth contributed to negative school experiences. Another significant experience that came up for many of the members in this workshop was that despite intention to focus on school work, it is often hard to prioritize school when life is constantly changing. Having the right resources for one to graduate high school on the right path, the support needed to address educational goals and external factors, and ability to apply to a college of a youth's choice, is what many only dream of achieving.

There are several statewide programs that provide education support to foster youth in high school:

- Independent Living Program (ILP) provides services to assist youth in obtaining a high school diploma, tutoring, career exploration and preparation for post-secondary training and start services for youth at age 16.<sup>27</sup>
- Foster Youth Services (FYS) currently provides a coordinator in each County Office of Education and one liaison at each school district to help oversee foster youth's academic records in order



to coordinate instruction, counseling, tutoring, mentoring, vocational training, emancipation services, and training for independent living for youth ages 16-21. Currently, it is mandatory that only one liaison at each school district is present for youth to utilize. Additionally, it is not specified in the legislation that the district liaison be a full time position or not assigned to other duties, which for larger school districts with a significant number of foster youth is challenging.

For foster youth who successfully complete high school and complete the college application process, once they begin attending college they are overburdened with financial and housing instability, and a lack of relational support. Many youth in this workshop spoke about how they want to pursue some sort of higher education.

However, some feel they are not educated well enough to go to college or that if they get into a school they will not be able to afford to stay very long. Members talked about how they had to take two years of remedial classes before they could even begin to take classes for college credit due to the lack of education they received in high school.

Given these experiences and the reality that many foster youth must navigate the world of college and adult life by themselves – a much different story than the average population – may be why statistics show that only 8% of former foster youth obtain a 2-year degree, less than 2% obtain a 4-year degree, and less than 1% obtain a graduate degree.<sup>28</sup> Throughout the weekend current and former foster youth, with the help of their workshop facilitators,

brainstormed good and bad experiences members had with education.

As stated in “Change Begins with Action,” CYC’s 2006 Policy Conference Report, college financial aid is yet another barrier those foster youth face when it comes to higher education. Because foster youth do not have parents who are able to support their children through college, foster youth must rely on financial aid that is not promised to them and requires them to know how to apply for financial aid correctly to indicate that they are foster youth. For Joanie, who wanted to go to college, not being approved for the Chafee grant and not knowing who to go to on campus to potentially access other tuition assistance left her unable to go to college because it was too expensive.

### FACTS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

- 70% of high school aged foster youth plan to attend college and 22% plan to continue their education beyond a college degree.<sup>32</sup>
- 8% of former foster youth obtain a 2-year degree, less than 2% obtain a 4-year degree, and less than 1% obtain a graduate degree.<sup>33</sup>
- 46% of foster youth do not complete high school compared to 30% of the general population.
- Foster youth do not receive needed support and mentorship from social workers, providers, teachers and others regarding their education and potential.<sup>34</sup>
- Foster youth lack necessary funds and financial aid to attend college. Even with available scholarships, 44% of youth are paying for school through loans and over 25% through their own employment.<sup>35</sup> Money was the money common barrier (50%) that youth reported for not attending school.<sup>36</sup>
- Out-of-state colleges have very limited financial assistance for foster youth.<sup>37</sup>

California has increased the financial resources and support programs available to foster youth who attend higher education. Here are some of the most significant supports foster youth have available to them in California:

- California Community College (CCC) Tuition Assistance provides virtually free tuition to former foster youth attending community colleges.
- Chafee Educational and Training Vouchers Program, also called Education and Training Vouchers, are grants of up to \$5,000 per year (based on campus, identified need, and priority criteria) for foster youth up to age 22 for use at 4-year colleges including out-of-state, community colleges and vocational schools. Due to increasing numbers of California foster youth now attending college, funding is less accessible for youth. Only 9% of the 35,664 eligible foster youth in the 2008-2009 school year received Chafee grants.<sup>29</sup>
- Counties can use Chafee ILSP funds not only for youth in care, but also to provide funding for higher education tuition, preparation, outreach and support services.
- Cal Grants: If youth meet GPA requirements and deadlines they are guaranteed a Cal-Grant. However, many foster youth are unaware of deadlines and struggle to maintain the required GPA or are not attending high schools that can certify their

GPA to meet CalGrant requirements.

- Foster care liaisons at community colleges: In 2006 the Foster Youth Success Initiative was launched which established foster care liaisons at each of the 110 Community College campuses.
- Campus Support Programs: Programs such as Guardian Scholars, Renaissance Scholars and Promise Scholars programs support former foster youth attending universities, colleges and trade schools. These programs differ at each campus and may include housing, academic, financial, or emotional support. Approximately 30 State and UC campuses as well as an increasing number of community college campuses in California have programs for foster youth. Unfortunately, programs like these assist only 5% of former foster youth.<sup>30</sup>

However, even with these resources, youth still struggle to prepare for and succeed in college. Youth need one on one support to navigate the college application process, emotional support to adjust to college life and crises that occur,<sup>31</sup> and year-round housing so that they can focus on their studies rather than worrying about where they will stay when the dorms close. Foster youth attending community colleges face additional challenges as housing is not available through the schools and they must rely more heavily on housing programs and employment to have stable housing and they are not necessarily surrounded by a supportive community focusing on school as well.



### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

1. CYC recommends that a transitional housing program (THP-Plus like program) specifically for foster youth in California community colleges be created.
2. CYC recommends that higher education entities (i.e. College Pathways) collaborate to seek corporate sponsorship for higher education campus support programs and other resources for foster youth attending high education.
3. CYC recommends that each county creates a position to assist foster youth in their pursuit of higher education. The assistance shall begin freshman year of high school and continue on until graduation. The county may determine the most appropriate placement for this position.

### IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY FOR AB 490

Implementation of AB 490 – Education Rights for Foster Youth – AB 490 passed in 2003, improves public school procedures so that foster youth have a better chance to succeed in school by requiring that youth are not forced to change schools unnecessarily, won't lose credits and can immediately enroll and quickly receive records at a new school. The bill also requires designation of a foster youth education liaison in each district.

### ACTION STEPS TO IMPLEMENT AB 490:

Counties should...

- Commit to implementing AB 490.
- Commit to follow through with the re-establishment of AB 490 and revision of the role of Foster Youth Liaisons.
- Commit to research why AB 490 is not being implemented.
- Commit to research which higher education support for foster youth is successfully working in other counties.
- Commit to have foster youth and community allies at the table.



# Budget

*All weekend long in the budget workshop youth discussed the current budget crisis in California and how the budget is affecting foster youth across the state. The goals of the workshop were: 1) to discuss how the budget is affecting foster youth across the state, 2) to identify what works in programs that are effective in helping youth reach their goals, and 3) to prioritize those good practices and encourage counties to continue funding programs that follow those good practices.*

These goals were accomplished through activities designed to help members understand the budget process, learn about budget advocacy and then begin to identify the good practices across the state that counties should prioritize in their funding. The budget workshop gave youth a chance to sit on the other side of the decision-making table. They had to role play the experience of making budget cuts to programs they cared about; this process was by far was the hardest for them to

role-play. Members gained a sense of what legislators must do each year when creating the state budget and recognized that in tough fiscal times cuts are sometimes inevitable. Members were then able to use this experience of balancing a budget to identify what characteristics were key to a program being helpful to the youth it served. They narrowed down their long list to include only the most important characteristics.

This is a very difficult time for CYC

members and foster youth across the state given a great decrease in funds to a variety of child welfare programs that youth rely on. Before this year, foster youth were already experiencing programs being drastically cut or even eliminated completely. In this workshop members were asked to imagine what additional budget cuts would do to youth who are in foster care or still relying on transitional services. CYC members as a whole feel there are other possible areas where funding should be cut – areas that youth who are the state's children do not rely on. There was a deep sense these budget cuts are only going to create a deeper hole for all those who are trying to improve their circumstances for themselves, their siblings and for others who are in or may enter the system.





#### FACTS ON THE BUDGET

- It is proposed that in the 2010-2011 fiscal year Social Services will receive a reduced amount of 6.9 billion dollars. There is also a threat that Cal Works will be completely eliminated in the 2010-2011 fiscal year. Additionally, the cost of higher education continues to rise. From the year 2008 to 2009, tuition increased by 6.4% for public California colleges and 4.4% for private colleges.<sup>38</sup>  
*In 2009-10 the following services received major cuts:*
- Kinship Support Services Programs
- Transitional Housing Placement Plus (THP-Plus)
- Title IV-E waiver allocations to Alameda and Los Angeles counties
- Aftercare services such as: Extended Independent Living Program, Chafee Educational and Training Vouchers Program, the Emancipated Foster Youth Stipends program
- Foster Parent training and recruitment
- Social worker recruitment and retention
- Adoption Assistance Program

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUDGET PRIORITIES

These budget priorities reflect the types of services that CYC members feel are essential for foster youth to succeed:

- Mental health services
- Wrap around support and programs that include support for all of the following:
  - Education
  - Housing
  - Employment
- Independent living skills training
- Supportive community and mentoring program
- Financial support
- Parenting support that engages both parents
- Youth participation in hiring program staff
- Transition services that serve youth 14-24

In addition to prioritizing these programs and services, CYC members feel that every county MUST engage youth in their county in budget decision making.

# Conclusion

*The past few years have been challenging for foster youth in California. The state's fiscal climate has drastically impacted the lives of foster youth by decreasing funding for programs and resources that they depend on. Unlike children who grow up with their biological families, foster youth rely on the state to help them transition into adulthood; and while a successful transition is challenging in good economic times, without significant support it is nearly impossible when jobs are scarce and the cost of tuition continues to climb. The recommendations outlined in this report identify ways that policy makers and service providers can increase support for foster youth, providing them with opportunities to build meaningful life long relationships, develop necessary life skills, and fall back on a safety net they need and deserve, while they make their way into being an adult.*

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# “Voices of the Unheard” Taskforce

## *A Special Project of California Youth Connection*

Voices of the Unheard was a year-long taskforce formed to advocate, educate and work with decision makers to improve mental and public health outcomes for foster youth. The Taskforce consisted of six CYC members representing Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside Counties, who named the project, “Voices of the Unheard,” to represent foster youth who experience challenges with accessing public and mental health services and are traditionally unrepresented at policy making tables. The goals of the Taskforce were to advocate against budget cuts to mental and public health services, raise awareness of how these cuts affect current and former foster youth, and educate the community about the quality and accessibility of these services. The Taskforce hopes that current and former foster youth will be heard in the development of public and mental health policy and legislation in the future.

The Voices of the Unheard Taskforce spent a year identifying the challenges that foster youth face in accessing mental and public health services and the quality of these services. The members created and distributed surveys to youth in San Bernardino, Riverside and Los Angeles, and to CYC members across the state. In addition, the members held focus groups to better understand the challenges of these systems.

### BACKGROUND ON MENTAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES FOR FOSTER YOUTH

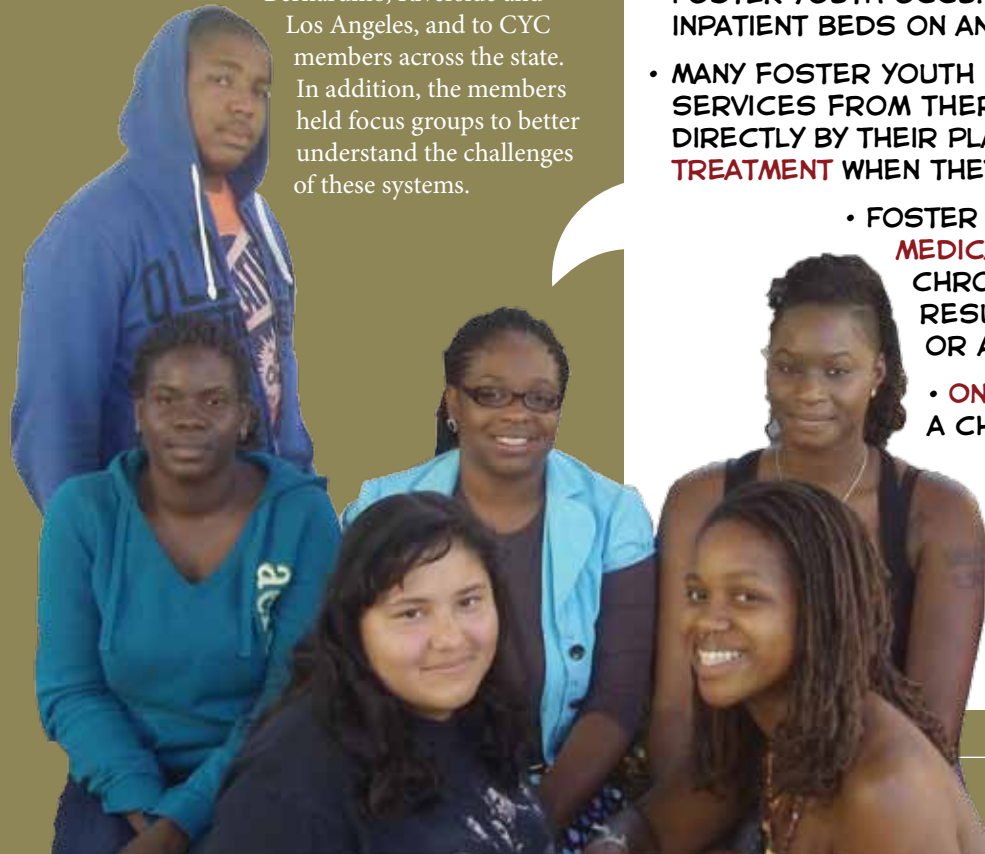
All foster youth qualify to receive Medi-Cal benefits as their primary source of health insurance until the age 21. Medi-Cal much like the child welfare system can be complex and hard to navigate for youth. Foster youth are at the mercy of their placements to provide information about healthy living, medical resources, access to doctors (including transportation), and information about their health care. Unlike youth who reside with their parents, foster youth have to coordinate their medical needs and services with

social workers, attorneys, caregivers and/or group home staff. Additional challenges arise when youth move from one county to another—their providers change and often their Medi-Cal does not transfer, particularly for mental health services.

Transitioning youth have further challenges accessing Medi-Cal. Once a youth transitions from foster care, they must reapply for Medi-Cal every year or whenever they move. As many foster youth emancipate into unstable housing, move frequently and often experience episodes of homelessness, these requirements are challenging for youth to meet.

### FACTS ON MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH OF FOSTER YOUTH

- IN THE US, **1 IN 10 CHILDREN** AND ADOLESCENTS SUFFER FROM MENTAL ILLNESS SEVERE ENOUGH TO CAUSE SOME LEVEL OF IMPAIRMENT.
- YOUTH WHO HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO ABUSE AND NEGLECT EXPERIENCE **INCREASED BEHAVIORAL ISSUES** INCLUDING: EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION, INSECURE ATTACHMENT BEHAVIORS, ANXIETY, PTSD AND DEPRESSION.
- FOSTER YOUTH OCCUPY **40%** OF THE CHILD MENTAL HEALTH INPATIENT BEDS ON ANY GIVEN DAY.
- MANY FOSTER YOUTH RECEIVE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FROM THERAPISTS WHO ARE FUNDED DIRECTLY BY THEIR PLACEMENT AND ARE FORCED TO **STOP TREATMENT** WHEN THEY MOVE PLACEMENTS.
- FOSTER YOUTH ARE AT ESPECIALLY **HIGH MEDICAL RISK** AND LIKELY TO HAVE ACUTE, CHRONIC, AND COMPLEX HEALTH NEEDS RESULTING FROM PAST NEGLECT OR ABUSE.
- **ONE IN TWO** YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE HAVE A CHRONIC MEDICAL CONDITION.
- APPROXIMATELY **67% OF PARENTS** WITH YOUTH IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM REQUIRE SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT, BUT CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES ARE ABLE TO PROVIDE TREATMENT FOR ONLY 31%.



## PUBLIC HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Extend Medi-Cal for foster youth until age 26
2. Eliminate Medi-Cal annual re-eligibility forms for foster youth so they receive uninterrupted Medi-Cal until age 21 as intended by law
3. Foster youth should receive Medi-Cal cancellation notices six months prior to Medi-Cal being terminated
4. All counties should develop a plan to identify the public health services needed in their county and action steps to address the needs
5. Each county should have a Health Specialist or Public Health Nurse to promote health education for foster youth in their county

## MENTAL HEALTH BILL OF RIGHTS

1. You have the right to interview two to four therapists prior to working with them so that a connection can be built.
2. You have the right to refuse medication as long as you are not at risk of hurting yourself or others and you are at least 10 years old.
3. You have the right to be presented with all of your mental health options, including but not limited to: holistic or natural approaches, mentoring, peer counseling, therapy, and medication. In addition, you have the right to refuse treatment after you have attempted your options.
4. You have the right to continue services with your therapist or counselor if you have moved placements within 30 miles of your previous placement. It is the county Department of Social Services' responsibility to find appropriate transportation to ensure you can continue these services.
5. You have the right to have your mental health assessed by a trained evaluator who has had no personal ties to you before you entered into services.
6. You have the right to have mental health services provided outside of your place of residence.
7. Your social worker must help complete the necessary paperwork in order for you to obtain mental health services and these services must be included in your emancipation checklist.
8. You have the right to obtain your health records (i.e. education and health passport).
9. You have the right to confidentiality when interacting with mental health professionals, unless you are at risk of harming yourself or others.

## NEXT STEPS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

CYC's Legislative Committee, Advisory Board and our local chapters were excited by the work of the Taskforce and in particular the Mental Health Bill of Rights. Our members felt that ensuring that foster youth have access to appropriate mental health services was a top priority for the year and they decided to pursue statewide legislation to enact the Mental Health Bill of Rights into law. At the time this report was published, AB 181 had passed through the Assembly's Policy Committee. Please see our website at [www.calyouthconn.org](http://www.calyouthconn.org) for more information on this bill and other CYC sponsored legislation.

Thank you Taskforce members and supporters for all of your hard work throughout the year.

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## THANK YOU

*to the California Endowment  
for making the project possible.*





CALIFORNIA **YOUTH** CONNECTION

*Our Voices, Our Future*

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**CALYOUTHCONN.ORG**





# 10 Ways You Can Support CYC

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1. Write letters to your local legislators and policy makers to support CYC sponsored and supported legislation.
2. Find out what your local CYC chapter is working on as their local issue, and see how you can provide your support and expertise!
3. Become an adult supporter (volunteer) for your local CYC chapter, or tell others about getting involved.
4. Tell other current and former foster youth about CYC, and encourage them to get involved.
5. Provide transportation for CYC members in your area to local chapter meetings.
6. Donate supplies, food, and/or a meeting space to your local CYC chapter or to CYC's Statewide Office.
7. Sponsor a youth or a chapter for the yearly Day at the Capital Conference or the Summer Policy and Leadership Conference!
8. Volunteer to work with CYC on a fundraiser in your area.
9. Sponsor a youth to travel to Sacramento to testify at a legislative hearing.
10. Tell others about CYC and what current and former foster youth are trying to do to change the foster care system!

**For More Information about California Youth Connection, please contact  
415.442.5060 or 323.267.0720**